

Warming

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the answer is yes. In fact a significant body of research is emerging that suggests that Black people care more about climate change than most other groups in the United States.

The racial impact of global warming is laid out in the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s 2004 report, “Climate Change: An Unequal Burden.”

“Where U.S. Energy Policy is concerned,

‘Unless appropriate actions are taken to mitigate its effects or adapt to them, climate change will worsen existing equity issues within the United States’
—Congressional Black Caucus Foundation

African Americans are proverbial canaries in the mineshaft,” the report says. “We are on the frontline of the likely social, environmental, and economic upheaval resulting from climate change.”

Reports and calls to action specifically within Black communities nationwide picked up first after Hurricane Katrina in 2006 and again after Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

The CBC Foundation listed three findings:

1) African Americans are already hit more than other groups by the health effects of climate change, including deaths during heat waves and from worsened air pollution. “Similarly, unemployment and economic hardship associated with climate change will fall most heavily on the African American community,” the report says.

2) African Americans bear less responsibility for climate change than other Americans do because “both historically and at present, African Americans emit less greenhouse gas.”

3) Finally, the CBC Foundation warns that policies to help soften or fix climate change are likely to “generate large health and economic benefits or costs for African Americans, depending on how they are structured.

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change will worsen existing equity issues within the United States,” the Black Caucus says.

Public Impact

Officials at Multnomah County say their newest report strongly embraces climate change equity, which it illustrates with charts showing health statistics on hospital visits in environmental hotspots.

The county’s charts show the elderly, disabled, people living in poverty, communities of color and the homeless are the people most likely to be concentrated in parts of the city with fewest trees, greenbelts, parks or waterways.

Multnomah County’s short list of public impacts includes:

— an increase in heat-related illness and deaths, including heart

emergencies, especially “among vulnerable populations such as the elderly, low income, homeless, pregnant women, and individuals with outdoor occupations;”

— “diminished lung function, increased asthma, and increases in premature mortality,” from air pollution, including ozone;

— and more diseases spread by insects and vermin — especially mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus — due to longer breeding seasons.

Urban Heat Islands

Of extra concern is the “urban heat island” effect, in which the concentration of paved surfaces in a neighborhood absorbs heat and magnifies it, boosting temperatures hotter than the surrounding area.

In 1995 some 750 people died in Chicago’s infamous heat wave when daytime temperatures spiked for just five days in a row – the hottest day reached 106 degrees, but, experts say, the heat island effect made it closer to 150 degrees in some spots.

Most of the dead were elderly, disabled and African American people who did not want to open their windows or go outside for fear of crime, reports said at the time.

Experts say similar heat waves will especially impact the Pacific Northwest because our climate has historically been so mild that few people have air conditioners; an increase in daytime, and nighttime, heat waves in summer has already begun, the

Trick or Treat?



PHOTO BY JERRY FOSTER

New Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat on Halloween handed out bike safety lights to kids at Vernon Elementary School on Northeast Killingsworth Street. She was helped by Principal Tina Acker; all were swarmed by eager kids.

hottest clocking in at 115 degrees in 2009.

Not only that, these warmer temperatures simmer air pollutants into a toxic soup called ozone — the culprit in upper respiratory illnesses from asthma to pneumonia and bronchitis — not to mention turning up the dial on heart attacks.

Duncan says the simple question of where people live and how rich or poor they are can make all the difference in terms of who is most hurt by the extra smog, heat and vermin that all come with global warming.

“These are people who do not have the means to adapt or to get out of town; these are people who often live in substandard

housing, conditions that already have mold and mildew that exacerbate their children’s asthma,” he says.

“They are elders who are not socially mobile but they live in a heat island, and they may have little access to parks and greenspaces because they have little choice in their housing options.

“People here are subject to a double-whammy.”

For more on the Multnomah Climate Change Plan go to www.multco.us and search “climate change,” or go to www.kingcounty.gov and search “climate change.”

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churches we are working with, are so critical,” she said. And that’s why we are actively targeting funding dollars to culturally specific services.”

Jean DeMaster, executive director of Human Solutions said that while the recession may officially be over, DeMaster said, “It is not over for poor people.

“We are seeing an increase in homeless families, especially families who are hard hit by the recession and the fact that our families can’t get living wage jobs.”

Pastor William Hardy said he thought of the 18,000 people displaced in the 1948 Vanport flood, when he decided to offer the church building for use by the day center.

“The African American community in Portland became instantly homeless,” he said. Many Vanport residents lost their photos, treasures, everything they possessed that day. “Everything sacred to them was gone in a flash.”

Hardy’s parents told him the story of the flood, and how Portland churches and citizens rallied to help.

“So if I’m in a position to open doors for other Oregonians who are homeless, why

shouldn’t I do that?”

The Parkrose Winter Family Shelter opens today Nov. 1 at Parkrose Community United Church of Christ, 12505 NE Halsey St. It will be open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. nightly between Nov. 1, and April 30, 2014.

The Parkrose shelter has space for 100 people at night, but just 70 during the day. Human Solutions also operates the 15-bed Daybreak Shelter Network. Portland Homeless Family Solutions runs a 27-bed family shelter in Goose Hollow. The City of Portland will operate a shelter for 70 single women.

In the past, Human Solutions held a lottery to decide who could stay inside, and who had to leave. Opening the day shelter at Highland Christian Center means from now on no families will have to be on the street during the day. And if more family shelter beds are needed this winter, Highland has agreed to host a night shelter too.

“There is no person, no parent who wants to be homeless. And in a perfect world no-one would be,” said Multnomah County

Chair Marissa Madrigal at the day center’s launch.

“The need is huge and heartbreaking, but

The need is huge and heartbreaking, but the effort to meet the need is inspiring
— Marissa Madrigal

the effort to meet the need is inspiring.”

Even affordable housing often is priced too high for people under 40 percent of the average family income, DeMaster points out.

A new 67-unit affordable housing complex on NE 102nd and Glisan, created with state, city and county funds, will house families earning from 40-60 percent of median income. But with rents priced from \$400 to \$700, it is beyond the reach of people on welfare or those in low-waged or part-time work.

This is a problem that can only be solved on a national level, DeMasters says. “We need housing that’s affordable to people at very low income levels.”

Li urged the public to join in the effort to help homeless families by donating bedding, food, books, toys, clothing and volunteer time.

“No one person can end homelessness but we can all contribute to this effort,” she said.

“These are our children. These are our community’s children. Please engage with us.”

The support means a lot to Johnny and Emoni Hollingsworth. Johnny, 33, became a father at just 19 years old, after a childhood of insecurity. Today he is taking Emoni to register at high school. Then he begins his job search. He says he’ll take anything offered.

“Failure is not an option for me,” he says. “I just want to make my child happy.

Emoni knows she has six weeks of catching up to do, but she is not daunted.

“I want to be a judge or an attorney when I get older,” she says. “I like school.”